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LETTER DATED 23 SEPTEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ZIMBABWE TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to the present war raging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between the allied forces of the four member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), that is, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, on the one hand, and Rwanda and Uganda on the other.

I have the further honour to attach a formal letter to you, which clearly sets out my Government's position with respect to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I request that the letter be circulated to all the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) M. T. MAPURANGA
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

Annex

Letter from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council regarding the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

On the instruction of my Government, I have the honour to inform you that on 2 August 1998 an armed confrontation flared up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, disturbing not just the peace and security of that country, but that of the whole region and inevitably the world at large. The outbreak of armed confrontation was clearly seen by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as an invasion by Rwanda and Uganda aimed at the removal of President Laurent Desiré Kabila from the helm of that country after only 15 months in power. At the same time, the Governments of Rwanda and Uganda labelled the flare-up a generalized internal rebellion by the Congolese populace against the system of governance of the Head of State.

At the Southern African international dialogue on smart partnership, which was held in the Namibian coastal town of Swakopmund at the end of July 1998, President Museveni of Uganda asked President Mugabe of Zimbabwe, in his capacity as Chairman of the Southern African Development Coordination organ on politics, defence and security, to convene a meeting to discuss the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. President Museveni told President Mugabe of Zimbabwe, President Mkapa of the United Republic of Tanzania and President Nujoma of Namibia that "trouble was brewing" in eastern Congo and that President Mugabe and his colleagues needed to call President Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and President Bizimungu of the Republic of Rwanda to ascertain what was happening.

Pursuant to President Museveni's request, President Mugabe called a Summit meeting of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Angola, Namibia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe, at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on 7 and 8 August 1998. The disagreement at the Victoria Falls Summit regarding the nature of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that is, whether it was an internal rebellion against President Kabila, as claimed by Rwanda and Uganda, or a foreign invasion, prompted the meeting to form a special committee comprising Namibia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, which had a dual mandate:

(a) To verify whether the fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the result of an internal rebellion or an aggression by neighbouring countries;

(b) To recommend a way forward, depending on the findings.

In fulfilment of the dual mandate set out above, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Namibia, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, headed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Zimbabwe, visited Uganda, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Goma from 11 to 18 August 1998. During their trip, the team held extensive discussions with President Museveni, President

Bizimungu, President Kabila and Deputy President Kagame of Rwanda, as well as the rebel leadership in Goma, and had the chance to assess the situation on the ground as well as to receive information from the population regarding the war situation.

The ministerial team concluded that while there was a rebellion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there was very clear and irrefutable evidence of a foreign invasion. In addition to eyewitness reports of Rwandan troops passing through to the war front, there was also this interesting "coincidence" that the "rebellion" only started after President Kabila had dismissed Rwandan officers from the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, some former Rwandan officers, such as Commander James Kabare, were seen coordinating anti-Government efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when he should have been in Rwanda.

There have been less than convincing denials of involvement by Rwanda, which maintains that the anti-Government activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are mainly the work of rebels. President Museveni of Uganda has since admitted to having about 50 officers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in addition to the two battalions in the eastern part of the country which, he said, were there within the terms of the agreement with President Kabila's Government. The Foreign and Defence Ministers of Uganda also admitted to the involvement of their forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. President Bizimungu's denial of the involvement of Rwanda, despite eyewitness reports to the contrary, is characteristic. During the campaign by President Kabila to oust the late Mobutu Sese Seko, Rwanda and Uganda denied involvement at first, only admitting involvement after the removal of Mobutu. In addition, there is the evidence provided by captured Rwandan and Ugandan troops.

President Kabila, after realizing that he could not contain the foreign invaders alone, appealed for assistance from the member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The request was made at the meeting of the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee, which was held in Harare, Zimbabwe, on 18 August 1998 to consider the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The involvement by Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia came as a result of the appeal by the internationally recognized Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a member State of SADC. The involvement, which, unfortunately, has mischievously been discussed out of context, ought to be understood for what it really is, a regional commitment to assist brothers and sisters to repel aggressors.

Furthermore, the request of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to SADC is in line with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations regarding the right of a State to ask for military assistance when its security, sovereignty and territorial integrity are threatened. Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia's positive response is also in line with the resolution approved at the Summit of the Organization of African Unity in Harare, in 1997, condemning the change of legitimate Governments by military means. Additionally, the decision is also in line with a resolution of the Inter-State Defence and Security Committee at a meeting held in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1995, where SADC countries agreed to take collective action in the case of attempted coups to remove Governments by military means. It was in this spirit that troops from South Africa and

Botswana have intervened in the Kingdom of Lesotho to suppress an army mutiny against the Government.

It was on the basis of the above considerations that Zimbabwe and her allies decided to respond positively before a legitimate Government was removed from power. In its final communiqué, the 1998 SADC Summit of Heads of State or Government, which took place in Mauritius from 13 to 14 September 1998, "welcomed the initiatives by SADC and its member States intended to assist in the restoration of peace, security and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular the Victoria Falls and Pretoria Initiatives. In that regard, the Summit reaffirmed its call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and commended the Governments of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe for providing troops to assist the Government and people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to defeat the illegal attempt by the rebels and their allies to capture the capital city, Kinshasa, and other strategic areas."

In that regard, we have stated since the beginning that our limited objective is to defend Kinshasa so that it does not fall to the invaders, because, if it does, they would not see any reason to negotiate. We moved in to foil a military solution to a political problem and foil the designs of the invaders. We also desire the negotiations to be real and not an imposition on a prostrate Government. The allied forces long-term objective is to give the Congolese people the chance to voluntarily choose who is to rule over them through democratic elections, which President Kabila has promised to hold in April 1999. The Congolese, and only they, should determine their destiny.

The hosting of the second Victoria Falls Summit on 7 and 8 September 1998 and the Addis Ababa meeting of Defence Ministers is indicative of the political will and desire to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Zimbabwe remains committed to the search for a negotiated settlement to the conflict in accordance with the Charters of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community. However, it has been the continued denial on the part of Rwanda and the grossly deflated figures concerning the extent of its involvement by Uganda which has become the stumbling block to the agreement on the practical terms of a ceasefire. The Addis Ababa meeting failed because Rwanda and Uganda walked out. At the same time Uganda has moved openly to occupy parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Zimbabwe has always supported the path of dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even when we intervened on 18 August, it was in order to avoid a military takeover in Kinshasa. Today again we are championing a ceasefire and negotiations, while it appears that Uganda and Rwanda are only using negotiations as diversionary tactics while strengthening their capacity for war.

I have the honour to request that the present letter be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) M. T. MAPURANGA
Ambassador and Permanent Representative